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Feeling through Practice: Subjectivity and Emotion in Children's Writing

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Abstract

This article analyzes how children in 1930s' Britain narrated their everyday behavior, feelings and fantasies when asked to do so by their teachers. It is based upon a study of over one thousand essays that were written by children in 1937 and 1938, which were collected by the British social investigative organization, Mass Observation, as part of its Worktown Project. The argument is situated within the history of emotions and we interrogate the utility of recent conceptual frameworks for the better understanding of children's subjectivities. The essays show that children were able to juggle contradictory demands and expectations, learn emotional codes and match emotional style to spatial context when moving between school, home and leisure arenas. To some extent, then, children adapted and shaped their behavior to comply with specific emotional communities. However, we argue that this model offers only a partial account of children's emotional practices. In the second part of the article we suggest a move away from thinking about emotional communities or emotional styles as pre-dominantly value-based and spatially-defined (by the school, home, street – spaces which children inhabited and might have influenced but which were conceived and built by adults) and argue instead for increased attention to be paid to the material context and,

particularly, the relationships that operated within and across these spaces.

Ultimately, we argue, children's emotional experiences were less about

"learning to feel" than feeling through practice.

Introduction

"Come down, lazy bones!" shouted my mother, as the clock struck 9.30am. "I'm getting dressed," I shouted. I was lazy in bed reading at the time. "Are you getting up?" she shouted over and over again. "I'm coming now," I said in a rage, throwing the book into the air. It was a nice morning. My mother always opens the windows. When I threw the book into the air it must have gone through the window. I heard someone shout "Oh! My head."¹

So began a neatly-written, one-page essay entitled "What I did on my Thursday holiday" written in May 1937. Its author was Flora Caine, a pupil in the senior girls' department at Pike's Lane Council School in Bolton, North-West England, and this composition was one of many that she wrote alongside her classmates that year, addressing a range of topics including "What I think of Jesus," "When I grow up" and "Things I learn at home that I do not learn at school." Her class teacher passed the essays on to the social research organization Mass Observation, and today these children's essays are preserved in the Mass Observation Archive, sitting alongside hundreds of other children's essays collected, and sometimes actively solicited, by the organization across the mid-twentieth century. This article is based on a study of over one thousand essays that were written in 1937 and 1938 by children – about three quarters of whom were girls – aged seven to fourteen.² They were collected from a number of schools as part of

Mass Observation's research conducted in and around Bolton ("Worktown") between 1937 and 1940.³

At least in part inspired by Helen and Robert Lynd's 1929 study of the American community they named "Middletown,"⁴ Mass Observation's Worktown Project represented its most sustained attempt to catalogue and understand everyday life in context: to "take the whole structure of the place and analyze it out."⁵ Yet this was an attempt at objective analysis through a study of the subjective. From its inception, Mass Observation was interested in the subconscious, the imagined and the emotional. One of the organization's earliest national interests was the demonstration of pageantry during the coronation of King George VI in 1937 and its emotional effect on the masses.⁶ To gather data, "trained" and "untrained" observers were recruited to act as "cameras with which we are trying to photograph contemporary life."⁷ But if their task was to contribute to a scientific analysis, it was acknowledged, even stressed, that this was to be via subjective understandings. An observer's appeal for information, it was suggested,

...should not be directed only to the analytical and intellectual powers of those who answer, but, above all, to sincerity, to the personal interests involved, and to that emotional attitude which presses towards expression and which makes a statement into an act which is significant because it is felt to have a practical influence upon an important issue.⁸

Despite such an emphasis, even the "trained" Mass Observers could be remarkably clumsy in their analysis of the subjective lives they described. The results of the Worktown Project have sometimes been characterized as the observation of the northern working classes by middle-

class southerners.⁹ Observers frequently thought of themselves as distanced – socially, culturally and emotionally – from their Bolton subjects of research. A casually condescending tone is undoubtedly apparent in some of the research notes compiled by one observer, Oxford-educated Frank Cawson, who made a series of pen-sketches of Flora Caine and her classmates. He noted of Flora herself: “Father lorry driver, swears a lot. Spoil v scold. Mother admits can’t manage her. Very funny looking. Father made her stick up for herself. Very pugnacious. Plausible, telltale. Very unpopular....Untidy clothes.”¹⁰ Such judgements reflected a hierarchy of power that was accentuated by differences of gender and generation. Cawson was not only dismissive of the physical and behavioral attributes of these children and their parents, but made comment on their emotional qualities: Vera Slater had “rather a temper. Good apart from that”; Helen Harris was “often giddy”; Nella Greenwood was “good hearted, gossipy”. Annie Hilton’s mother had “a terrible temper, child rather nervous”; while in Cawson’s notes for Freda Baxter – “V. refined. Lives in flat with mother. Rather emotional type” – it is not clear whether his final statement, intended pejoratively, referred to mother or daughter.

Such comments belied the complexity of these children’s emotional lives. Many of the children demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of their emotional selves in their written accounts. A sense of self grounded in, but capable of transcending, spatial and relational contexts permeates their essays. Flora herself aspired to be an author when she grew up and spent her spare time “trying to make up good sensible poems.”¹¹ Her ability to think independently and to manipulate words to describe her feelings and express her creative imagination is evident in several of her essays, from her description of an imagined future as a farm worker: “Just think how nice the fresh cream would be. Anyone who reads this I hope it does not make your mouth water as it has made mine,” to her take on inequality and struggles of power. Writing about “Hell” she noted that “the devil will never be as rich as God. People say he burns you in a fire

but I don't state that it's true...He, the man who has no power, is trying all he can to take God's." Her emotional value-system probably differed very little, in fact, to what Cawson might have believed to be the ideal attributes of a (middle-class) child, and she declared that what she most appreciated in others was friendship, love and kindness.¹²

Children and Emotion

Whilst the academic study of emotion has deep temporal and cross-disciplinary foundations, historians have of late contributed a number of methodological insights to the field. For Peter and Carol Stearns, "emotionology" – the study of emotional codes and standards – facilitated the analysis of emotional culture.¹³ The study of emotional repertoires and expression – William Reddy's "emotives" for example – and of collective feeling-systems – "emotional regimes" or "emotional communities" – has also provided a strong analytical framework for the historicity of feeling.¹⁴ Barbara Rosenwein's development of the latter has been particularly influential. First advanced ten years ago and reiterated several times since, she suggests that "emotional communities are groups – usually but not always social groups – that have their own particular values, modes of feeling and ways to express those feelings."¹⁵

Rosenwein's work has been further developed by others, among them Benno Gammerl, for whom "emotional styles" encompass "the experience, fostering, and display of emotions, and oscillate between discursive patterns and embodied practices as well as between common scripts and specific appropriations." According to Gammerl, "styles correspond with notions of community" but are more explicitly spatially defined: "The supermarket calls for a different emotional repertoire compared to the beach or the office. How specific emotions like grief,

happiness or affection are generated, handled and expressed depends to a large degree on where they occur.”¹⁶ As Monique Scheer observes, if they are to do the conceptual work asked of them, notions of “emotional communities” and “emotional styles” (her preference is for the latter) need “to be drawn into the everyday social life via an emphasis on the practices that generate and sustain such a community or culture.”¹⁷ Scheer herself suggests that attention to “emotional practices” “promises to bridge persistent dichotomies with which historians of emotion grapple, such as body and mind, structure and agency, as well as expression and experience.”¹⁸

Historians attending to the history of childhood and emotion have sought to develop concepts that speak to the specificity of children’s experiences; not least their relationship to adult norms and power. Karen Vallgård, Kristine Alexander and Stephanie Olsen have, for example, suggested the concept of “emotional formations”, to describe a collective in which “there exists a certain level of coherence in people’s conception of appropriate or even fathomable emotional comportment in different situations”, as well as a process “that depends on each individual learning the imparted codes of feeling.” These “emotional formations”, they argue, are bounded by “emotional frontiers”, which might be difficult for children to traverse. They suggest that this concept is “particularly relevant in colonial and imperial encounters, in which different sets of formal and informal educators often sought to teach children particular habits of feeling, in accordance with the role envisioned for them in the future of the nation, colony, and empire.”¹⁹

This is a welcome formulation that pays attention to the power dynamics of emotional learning. However, it implicitly posits children as responsive to a set of emotional codes created by adults. As Vallgård *et al* acknowledge, “the structures of feeling that characterize a particular

emotional formation helped to secure a hierarchically ordered set of social categorizations.”²⁰ Despite an impressive attempt by historians to recover children’s agency in a variety of contexts, an exploration of the way in which they were able to adapt and shape their behavior to comply with specific emotional communities – or indeed, to resist and subvert them – nevertheless continues to see them as reactive. A recent collection of essays by Ute Frevert *et al*, for example, asks how children in the past “learnt how to feel,” offering an impressive analysis of “the changing emotional repertoire offered to children within two heterogeneous genres, children’s literature and advice manuals.” The editors are sensibly attuned to reading as an “active experience”, and prefer to talk of “learning” rather than “teaching”, but this nevertheless continues to have hierarchical connotations; the authors suggest that “children’s books...proved to be an important genre in the process of constructing and producing emotions” and had a “significant function through which children were directly shaped.”²¹

As we will demonstrate in the next section of this article, children might indeed alter their behavior in different contexts. The space of the school in particular can be characterized as an emotional formation or community within which particular emotional styles were demanded and which children railed against or acquiesced in as they confronted emotional frontiers. However, our sources facilitate a second way of understanding children’s subjectivities. In the final section we suggest a move away from thinking about emotional communities or emotional styles as pre-dominantly value-based and spatially-defined (by the school, home, street – spaces which children inhabited and might have influenced but which were conceived and built by adults) and argue for increased attention to the relationships – and, to invoke Scheer’s work, the “emotional practices” – that operated within and across these spaces.

To do this, we need to pay more attention to subjectivity: how children themselves understood their emotional experiences and relationships with others. Most histories of childhood are explored through sources created by adults.²² In the inaugural issue of the *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*, launched in 2008, Peter Stearns outlined what he saw as the key challenges for the history of childhood. The first, his “granddaddy issue,” was “the virtually unprecedented problems of getting information from children themselves, as opposed to adult perceptions and recommendations and adult-created artefacts.”²³ Accessing children’s subjective understandings is no easy task. In his important history of the place of the child in the post-1945 settlement, Mathew Thomson explores how a top-down sense of “the child’s view of the world” increasingly framed social policy, but acknowledges his own inattention to the narratives of children themselves.²⁴ Frevert’s collection “does not explore what children actually learnt from children’s books or advice manuals,” noting that it “would be very difficult to historically reconstruct the reception of the practical knowledge that was offered.”²⁵

Such challenges have not deterred all efforts by historians to explore the self-representations of children; some have made children’s writings a central part of their work. *The Tidy House*, first published in 1982, is described by its author Carolyn Steedman as being “about little girls and their mediation and manipulation of a culture in written words...extraordinary in what it demonstrates of children’s involvement in the process of their own socialization.”²⁶ Here the problem of source availability was not an issue – Steedman was a primary school teacher in the 1970s and could access the writings of her pupils. More recently, there has been a growing focus upon the ways in which children self-fashioned through their literary output. Emily Bruce has argued that middle-class children’s writing in eighteenth and nineteenth-century Germany provided an important training in sociability and class cultures; Saheed Aderinto uses letters written by Nigerian boys to colonial administrators to illuminate children’s contribution to

African literary culture as well as to explore their understanding of emotions such as fear; while Siân Pooley has asked how English children “composed their authorial selves in their writings,” through examination of the letters they wrote for publication in nineteenth-century newspaper columns.²⁷ Children’s school work is also increasingly seen to offer valuable historical evidence. Christina Benninghaus uses the school essays of 1920s’ German children to “provide unique insight into the daily lives and mental worlds of the underclass youth of the Weimar era”; James Greenhalgh has shown how essays written by Hull schoolgirls in February 1942 allowed girls to actively delineate gendered roles that echoed contemporary state-sponsored messages; and sociologist Jane Elliott has worked with essays written by eleven-year-olds for the National Child Development Study in 1969 to explore the ways in which children constructed gendered identities.²⁸

The Worktown essays – over one thousand in number – were written within the specific context of the schoolroom, asked explicitly about home and the relationships therein, and were composed by the first generation of children to engage with the new and powerful emotional mediums of commercialized leisure and particularly the cinema. Written with a great deal of candor and often lacking in guile, they provide intimate snapshots of the lives and loves, fears and fantasies of working-class children. Asked about her school holidays, Margaret Owen described how:

I stopped at home and played with my friends. I went blackberrying and I got a lot of blackberries. We went down the fields to have a walk and a man run [after] us. After that we went home and got into bed. Next morning we went and put a tent up in our garden and we were playing truth and dare and Ivy was it. Then she said to Joan Wood truth or dare and Joan said dare and she said dare you go round the tent

twice and kiss Barbara Francis. We had a happy time we had ice cream and all sorts of things. We sometimes play at house and we have a doll for our baby. Sometimes we go on the swings and have a lot of fun there we play at shop sometimes and have bricks for toffee. We also have real weights and weigh the bricks on them. We play at school and write on a board and easel and we chalk all sorts of things.²⁹

This article uses the contemporaneous writings of Margaret and her peers to explore how they wrote about themselves and their feelings. The next section explores the way in which children traversed different emotional contexts and sought to manage their competing demands. Cawson might have dismissed these children, but their essays show that they were able to juggle contradictory expectations, learn emotional codes and match emotional style to spatial context. The children describe complex social interactions in distinct, but permeable spaces, and suggest the performance of sophisticated emotional self-management.

Moving between Emotional Spaces

The built environment of the school has been a particular focus of spatial analysis in recent years.³⁰ In particular, the school has often been posited as a site of control and regulation over children's bodies, with its architecture and materiality conducive to the creation of a disciplinary space and culture. Referring to the one of the first generation of school buildings that followed the introduction of compulsory mass education – Nelson St School, built in 1876 in a poor area of Birmingham – Ian Grosvenor describes school as:

a space in which teachers developed their professional role, educating and disciplining

the young. Control was in the buildings, the space created, and in the material contents of this space – furniture and equipment. Under the influence of school architecture the child was transformed into a *schoolchild*, into a subject of *school* culture, a culture which stood for ideas about learning, discipline and authority relations quite at variance with the local culture.³¹

The school has also been recognized as a powerful emotional space. Joakim Landahl uses the framework of emotional communities in his work on Swedish schools in the second half of the nineteenth century. “The advent of mass schooling,” he argues, “can be described as a potential emotional revolution. The emergence of schools meant that a new institution was created which was able to disseminate emotional ideals to a completely new degree.”³² In Britain, too, the “civilizing mission” with which elementary schools were often tasked, particularly in urban working-class areas, was motivated by a drive to shape children’s emotions as well as their behavior. Examining late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century practice and pedagogy, Peter Yeandle has shown how the history stories in English elementary school readers were explicitly designed to provoke a particular emotional reaction in their young readers and thereby encourage an emotional attachment to the nation.³³ Perhaps even keener to elicit national (imperial) loyalties were the English managers of Irish schools. Paddy Dolan refers to nineteenth-century Irish education “as a state instrument of emotional integration”, arguing that the teaching could increasingly be characterized as “the emotionally controlled efforts of adults to control the emotions of children.”³⁴

Of course, humanities scholars have long approached space as “dynamic, constructed, and contested,”³⁵ and the above authors acknowledge that studying the intent of the adults who designed, managed or taught in these spaces provides no guarantee that children complied.

Stephen Humphries was one of the first to offer an analysis of working-class resistance to state schooling, arguing – provocatively and not always convincingly – that it was a result of a powerful class-consciousness.³⁶ Since then, other historians have developed more nuanced interpretations. Simon Sleight’s work on the development of urban space in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Melbourne, for example, reveals children actively shaping the city environment in line with their own subjectivities, while Jane Hamlett examines the role that “space and material culture played in shaping daily emotional life” in the Victorian and Edwardian English public school, finding a mismatch between the ideal of the disciplined and moral young men that such institutions were supposed to produce, and the emotional responses of the schoolboys themselves.³⁷

The Worktown essays were all written within the school environment and the children knew that their work would be reviewed. It is unclear whether or not they were aware that their essays were being scrutinized beyond the classroom, but we can assume that they at least expected their work to be read by their teacher, and the occasional correction of spelling and grammatical errors in red ink suggests that sometimes the essays were temporarily returned to the children for instructive purposes. Some of the children therefore adapted their writing – if not their practice – accordingly, reflecting the norms and emotional expectations of the social context. When asked, “What is good, what is bad,” one schoolgirl knew enough to say “it is bad to look on [other] people’s paper” (“copying!” explained her teacher in a note in the margin). Several sets of essays nonetheless contain at least a couple of very similar answers.³⁸

The children’s work is also marked by the awkward expression of dominant codes. Explaining “what is bad,” twelve-year-old Elsie Lowe listed “buying cheap shoes,” “parading Market Street at 10 o’clock” and “women drinking and smoking.”³⁹ A particularly striking trend was

the number of children who referred to helping people cross the road (the old, the blind, the young and even, in one case, “the poor”) as “good”, probably a direct influence of school lessons in a year in which road safety training was being pushed in classrooms across the country.⁴⁰ Elsewhere the teacher’s influence was even more obvious. “You’ll notice that a number of girls have mentioned cafes and museums,” wrote a teacher to accompany a set of essays on “What I like best,” explaining that this “may or may not” have been due to the fact that she had been asked how to spell these two words and had written them on the board.⁴¹

The children’s essays reveal an awareness of their place in a generational hierarchy that privileged the emotions and values of adults. Money is “more useful to grown up people than children because they buy food and clothing and other useful objects, while children spend it on sweets and other things which are of no use,” admitted one boy.⁴² Even the youngest children nevertheless demonstrated their strategic compliance with the dominant emotional expectations of the classroom. A week after the 1937 Armistice service, for example, one class of children was asked to write down what they had been thinking about during the two minutes’ silence. “I thought about the soldiers that was in the war. I thought about them who were killed in the war,” wrote eight-year-old Billy Bishop. A note added by his teacher stated: “He laughed all the time so I don’t think this is true.”⁴³ The apparent contradiction between this boy’s behavior in class (and by implication his emotional response) and his self-fashioning on paper, reminds us of long-established approaches to retrospectively-constructed life histories. As Alessandro Portelli put it in an early defense of oral history interviews: “They tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, what they now think they did.”⁴⁴ Billy was sufficiently alert to the emotional socialization of the classroom to know what he should have been thinking about. He was wise enough to express

this in his essay. He was also sufficiently resistant to dominant emotional codes to perform a different set of embodied emotional responses on the day.

The most significant “emotional frontier” for children might be thought to be that between home and school. Learning happened at home as well as in the classroom.⁴⁵ “We learn to bear pain at home but not at school”, wrote one nine year old, although there is no explanation of the context for this assertion.⁴⁶ Again, however, the provision of instruction did not guarantee acquiescence. In some instances, the children expressed overt contempt for the emotional tools brought to bear on them. Writing on “Heaven”, one essayist recorded that “A little boy had told his mother a lie and his mother said ‘you will never go to heaven’, so he told his mother the truth because he took it all in his head because he was a bit soft.”⁴⁷

The journey between school and home undoubtedly necessitated emotional work for children as they learnt to traverse the linguistic, behavioral and emotional codes upon which relationships within each space were founded. As we will demonstrate in the final section of this article, the boundaries between these spheres were remarkably permeable: children’s understandings of space were, on the whole, driven by their experiences of relationships within and across them. Nonetheless the essays reveal children working hard to mediate between often-contradictory expectations. One particular set of essays, “Things I learn at home that I do not learn at school,” demonstrates the children’s mindfulness of the need to present different versions of the self within each sphere.

“I learn plenty of things at home, and they are very useful,” began Jane Norris’s essay. She continued by describing the distinctions between home and school, and finished with an analysis of her own contradictory emotions, demonstrating an acute self-awareness:

[At home] I learn to make the beds and sweep carpets and dust. I say many things that are opposite to what I say at school. At school, I always say, “Miss Kemp” and when I am at home I always say “mother” because Miss Kemp is like the one who looks after you when you are in school, a kind of Head, over you like your mother. Sometimes the teacher says “take your books out,” but at home, my mother will say, “Put your book away and run me an errand.” If you are speaking when there is a lesson on, she gives you a hundred lines, but my mother says, “You will have to wash up those cups and saucers and put them away, you little monkey.” At school I ask to polish the desk, but at home I say that I don’t want to polish the piano, or the wireless. I always say, at 4.15, “I wish I was home.” But when I’m on my holidays I always say, “I wish I was at school,” because I get dreary.⁴⁸

For her classmate, Betsy Blackburn, the balance between school and home was a little different, with each requiring a different presentation of the self:

In school we don’t learn as much housework as we do at home because the teacher has not much time and also because she has lots of other girls to look after. We learn how to make the beds and clean the windows and set the tables and all useful things like that. At school we do learn useful things but not all of them. At home we learn to make things and at school we learn to cook things. Some things are said at school that are not said at home because some mothers think the children should not have dancing and others do, and some mothers think their children should not stay in if misbehaving. In school the teachers think different than the mothers.

Nonetheless Betsy wrote about making stews and dinners at school and “revising” them at home, demonstrating her understanding of the inter-relation of home and school.⁴⁹

Home and school were not, of course, the only spaces that offered lessons in feeling and doing. Nor were they the only spaces between which children journeyed. The new consumerism aimed at children and their parents that Peter Stearns has identified as a driver of the interwar turn towards childhood happiness in the United States, was also apparent (if to a lesser extent) within the British context.⁵⁰ Certainly the 1930s’ child had greater access to the commercialized world than any previous generation of working-class children. “We went to Woolworths, afterwards we went to Marks and Spencer and afterwards I got some new shoes and two new frocks,” wrote one child of an afternoon spent with her mother.⁵¹ Asked to write about their understanding of happiness, material factors loomed large in the children’s accounts. “I feel happy when it is my birthday because I get plenty of birthday cards and presents,” wrote one.⁵² Another recorded that:

A part of happiness is at the midsummer where we can go away on our holidays to the sea-side places. There when the sun is shining, we can go in the sea. There is another part of happiness at Christmas, we can have parties, and give presents, and get some back. I would be very happy if I had a swing, and a seesaw. Next I would like a big garden. Really happiness is a wonderful thing, because there is no sorrow.⁵³

The essays demonstrate the impact of consumerism on children in very precise ways. New, or seasonal, products were rapidly incorporated into the rhythms of everyday childhood play. Eight-year-old Joe Walker was not the only child to imply that his play was to some extent

determined by commercial interests. Asked what games he played and when, he explained, “we play top and whip in summer when it is warm. We play marbles in March and April. The shopkeeper sometimes tells us when it is marble time.”⁵⁴ But the latest leisure goods and entertainments also informed children’s emotional practices. Social commentators of both left and right increasingly warned of the impact of “modern” leisure forms on those they deemed to be emotionally vulnerable – chiefly women and the young.⁵⁵ If school was expected to provide a disciplinary context for the proper molding (and restraint) of children’s emotions, then commercial leisure was increasingly held to endanger the unformed mind; stimulating the sensations and promoting unrealistic fantasies of the future.⁵⁶ Cawson’s negative description of Freda Baxter (or her mother) as a “rather emotional type” speaks to classed, gendered and age specific assessments of the capacity of individuals to feel appropriately and to withstand emotional manipulation. Film-going was posited as particularly dangerous for those held to be emotionally vulnerable, capable of influencing patrons both within and beyond the cinema building itself.

The essays do show children responding powerfully to the messages coming from leisure. Popular culture provided an increasingly diverse set of scripts from which boys and girls – as well as adults – could self-fashion.⁵⁷ Attention to the play, stories and imagined worlds of children reveal their spatial horizons and emotional registers, and it is in the imaginative spaces that open up in the essays that the most obvious evidence of cultural scripts can be seen. Some used a language that would have been familiar to their parents from their own childhoods. The imagined adventure of one young pupil, for example, reflected the populist civilizing narrative of Empire taught in schools since the late nineteenth century: “I went to America and Africa. In Africa I was nearly killed. But a black man saved me but he was killed. I took his other children home and I soon learned them how to speak English.”⁵⁸ His classmate Celia Roberts

acknowledged that the cinema influenced her leisure time. She enjoyed playing cowboys: “I play them because it shows them on the pictures every time you go.”⁵⁹ For Stanley Fielding, too, the pictures he saw at the cinema provided the material for imaginative play: “I like the pictures better than anything else...I like it because we try to do what they have done on the pictures. Sometimes we manage and sometimes we don’t.”⁶⁰

It is perhaps not surprising that the cinema in particular was a strong influence on these children. “For a film fanatic, Bolton was almost like Mecca,” wrote film critic Leslie Halliwell of his own 1930s’ Bolton childhood, “At one time there lay within my easy reach no fewer than forty-seven cinemas of varying size, quality and character. None was more than five miles from Bolton’s town hall, and twenty-eight were within the boundaries of the borough.”⁶¹ Of forty senior Pike’s Lane girls questioned, thirty went to the cinema at least once a week.⁶² For one twelve year old girl the value of the cinema lay in its power to educate: “Pictures are good things, because they teach us things if they are history pictures.”⁶³ This form of leisure directly affected another girl’s sense of self and imagined future. She wrote that she wanted to be an actress “like Ginger Rogers” when she grew up:

...because you have lovely frocks and a lot of money and nice homes. I should like to live in New York where Fred Astaire is then we should go on the films together...We should have great fun with all the people watching us and saying what good dancers we are. I should like to be a blonde and I should have no makeup unless I am on the films.⁶⁴

The influence of Hollywood bled into children’s fantasies in more indirect ways, influencing the stories that they told. Asked what he would do if he was left a lot of money, a younger boy

imagined having gone to live in America: “Some gangsters were staying the hotel not far away. One day the gangsters stole my money. Seeing that I had no money I thought it is no use I pulled my revolver out and committed suicide.”⁶⁵

Commercial leisure clearly influenced the everyday behavior, fantasies and feelings of children. It was, on the whole, written about approvingly by the Bolton children, who enthusiastically absorbed, and re-purposed, its dominant messages. But the essays show that they were also able to step back and offer critical commentary about the impact and influence of particular leisure practices, as Andrew Davies has documented with regard to older working-class youths in the same period.⁶⁶ An awareness that film-going might be an unwholesome occupation, as some adult critics believed it to be, was hinted at by Amy Fox in her description of Heaven as “just another world like the one we live on at present except that it might not have pictures and dance halls.” She provided this implicit criticism even though she noted elsewhere that she went to the cinema three times a week.⁶⁷ In a set of essays on “what is good and what is bad,” written by boys and girls aged twelve and thirteen, children took great care in weighing the value of scientific and technological innovations: the motor car for example was regarded as both good and bad, sometimes within the same essay. What is particularly striking is the analytical work the children did in order to explain their answers and their tendency to harness their everyday experiences and feelings in crafting a response. When asked to write about his summer holidays George Turner, for example, confessed that “My worst thing in Blackpool is shopping for you do nothing but look at things and buy them.”⁶⁸ In an admirably direct piece of film criticism, Morag Reed showed that she was capable of maintaining a critical distance from the cinematic spell, asserting simply that, “Pictures are bad things when they are rubbish.”⁶⁹

Relationships, Emotions and Space

In many ways our discussion so far of children's movement between their school, home and leisure lives fits within Rosenwein's notion of emotional communities and Gammerl's idea of spatially-defined emotional styles. Billy Bishop, the boy who was asked to explain what he was thinking during the commemorative silence, identified "fundamental assumptions, values, goals, feeling rules, and accepted modes of expression" and responded accordingly – subverting, contesting and then acquiescing in those norms.⁷⁰ But, as Jan Plamper suggests, the emotional communities model has its limitations: "...the conception of emotional community itself suffers from the problems of any theory of societization...it is insufficiently open and radical: for are not the boundaries of an emotional community so porous and transient that one should rather be compelled to move away from the terminology of 'boundary', and hence of 'community'?"⁷¹

We suggest that there are two further limitations. The first, as discussed above, is that this model presents children as responsive to a set of emotional codes devised by adults. The second is that charting movement across different emotional frontiers may *suggest* a hierarchy between a supposedly "authentic" feeling and a learnt, "inauthentic", expression of emotion, even though historians have long been wary of this dualism.⁷² It is clearly an assumption to suggest that Ronnie Rudd's laughter – or, rather, the teacher's observation of his laughter – was somehow more "authentic" than his more solemn written account. Perhaps he was ashamed of laughing. Perhaps he was ashamed of his laughter (maybe he was nervous or provoked by another child) even at the time. It may be the case that he did indeed manipulate his writing to

conform with social expectations, but it is also possible that this eight-year-old wrote honestly about how he felt, and how he remembered he felt.

Research by Michael Roper, and more recently by Hera Cook, draws attention to the complex relationship between emotional codes and actual people, whilst emphasising the practices, material contexts and emotional relationships through which subjectivity is crafted.⁷³ Whilst cultural theorist Sara Ahmed has long posited the question “What do emotions do?”, Monique Scheer’s work suggests a reversal in focus, attending instead to how people *do* emotion.⁷⁴ For the latter “a history of emotions inspired by practice theory entails thinking harder about what people are doing, and to working out the specific situatedness of these things.”⁷⁵ If we are to think about children as not always responsive to adult-defined norms, styles and communities, then we need to pay more attention to how they themselves understood and described their emotional practices, even if this leads to a degree of conceptual messiness. As Ahmed writes, “Messiness is a good starting point for thinking with feeling...When experiences (human or otherwise) are messy, making distinctions that are clear can mean losing our capacity for description.”⁷⁶

It was certainly the case that most children constructed a sense of self that was rooted in the locales of everyday life. Of the hundreds of essays that Mass Observation collected, the most fantastical answer was penned by Annie Robinson, who was asked to describe “an adventure.” This schoolgirl imagined herself living in Japan in the seventeenth century, as a woman called “White Blossom.” In her story she was swept out to sea where she met mermaids, mermen, and the mer-king himself on a ruby throne.⁷⁷ Annie’s answer was, however, unusual. More generally children’s fantasy adventures drew upon the familiar and the everyday. Describing their “adventure,” most children fell back on trips to the countryside, park and, of course,

Bolton's near neighbor, Blackpool.⁷⁸ Others mixed fantasy with the world they knew. When one junior boy described "what I like best," he began by referring to an activity of which he may (or may not) have had some limited experience, but a change of tense quickly shifted his account into the realm of make-believe: "The thing I like best is going on ships and discovering things. I would wear a captain's cap, a navy blue coat and trousers and a silver badge to fix on [my] cap." Ultimately, though, his fantasy fell back on a knowledge of things closer to home. "I would [sail] the world every fortnight," he wrote, but "every Wednesday I would go for a sail round the Mersey."⁷⁹

This concentration upon the local might be one reason why descriptions of poverty or hardship feature very little in the essays. Although Bolton's cotton, coal and engineering industries had suffered as a result of the economic crisis of the 1920s and 1930s, the town had been much less badly affected than its neighbors such as Blackburn or Burnley.⁸⁰ But it may also be because of the importance of relationships in determining the contentedness or otherwise of the children. For if children's accounts were often based around the spaces and locales with which they were familiar, then those spaces were often defined by their everyday social relations. Worktown children expressed their own sense of self through writing their relationships with others. When one class was asked to write about "happiness," several referenced friends and family in their answers. One child responded:

When I want to be happy I always go and play with my very best friends. Sometimes I go down to my auntie's and uncle's in the country. At my auntie's I have a lot of pets and that is another thing that makes me very happy indeed. I go to the country nearby every weekend. Sometimes my brother will ask me some riddles, or jokes as well as a lot of other things.⁸¹

References to other people are scattered across descriptions of everyday life. Classmates populate descriptions of leisure time in particular. Siblings and extended family – aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents – also make frequent appearances. This, of course, is consistent with understandings of working-class communities, with their networks of extended kin and of cultures forged in local streets and neighborhoods.⁸² Indeed the apparent decline of such communities in the face of post-war reconstruction was a central theme for sociologists in the 1950s and 1960s who assumed that space defined social relations.⁸³ For the Worktown children, however, relationships not only played a role in defining space, but often took priority over it. When one junior boy was asked what he would do if he was left a lot of money, he fantasized about buying “a rich house,” but it was an imaginary playmate who took on the greater importance: “I was always playing and I took a boy with me whom I often played with. We were always together and played at everything. We had everything to play with and never got tired of playing.”⁸⁴ A senior girl expressed a similar preference when she wrote that one day she would like to own a farm in the Welsh hills: “I would ask my best friend to stay the whole of the holiday.”⁸⁵ Friends also inhabited fantasy spaces. Asked to write about “when I grow up,” one boy looked forward to a life of dancing and picture-going with two female classmates, adding that he would not marry them “because they are twins.”⁸⁶

Paying attention to the way that relationships are narrated in these essays changes the way in which we understand the children’s spatial and emotional frameworks. Photographs of working-class children in the early-to-middle years of the twentieth century tend to locate them in public: in the street, independent of their parents, and at play. Yet despite the ubiquity of the street in visual representations of the 1930s’ child, the essays provide a different spatial framework; one that was rooted in domestic relationships. Outside play was certainly a

common feature of these children's everyday lives (although the setting is, in fact, less often the street as the park, the beach, and the fields), but the space of the home – via its relationships – also comes to the fore in these self-representations. The essays are marked by a sense of familial intimacy most strongly expressed by girls towards their mothers and often rooted in the sharing of housework: “Sometimes I make the beds with my mother. I get at one end while my mother gets at the other.”⁸⁷ While a number of oral historians have demonstrated the extent to which working-class girls – in contrast to their brothers – could be burdened with domestic work from an early age, the Worktown children often represent the tasks as positive, enjoyable experiences.⁸⁸ “In my holidays I like to help my mother to clean and to wash up the pots,” wrote one girl, “I also like to go [on] my mother's errands.”⁸⁹ Indeed, when asked to describe “The day I liked best,” Dorothy Smith chose a day filled with chores:

The day I liked best was on a Saturday... I got up in the morning and dressed myself and then dressed my young brother. Then we went downstairs and washed us and had our breakfast and after that my brother went to the park and I tidied the table [and] washed up. I made the beds after washing up and then I swept up, and I dusted and then I scrubbed the front and back. Mother said I had done a good deed... Then I went to the chip and fish shop for dinner and went to the cake shop for dad's dinner for his meat and potatoes for him and then when we had finished our dinner I tidied the table and washed up again then about two o'clock we went to the pictures and it was a very nice picture. Then at night time I had to go to town with mother and I wanted to play in the park and I didn't go to the town.⁹⁰

The shared experience of the everyday could create an emotional intimacy between mother and daughter that is also reflected in the essays. One girl who imagined buying new dresses

immediately “went home to show my mother them. When I got to the gate I saw my mother at the door and she asked me what I had got and I told her I would show her them so I showed her them and she said they were nice.”⁹¹ Fathers appear less often but are still described with much affection. In an important contribution to the history of fatherhood in late nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Britain, Julie-Marie Strange uses working-class autobiography to reinsert fathers into the intimacies of everyday family life, demonstrating along the way “how the performance and understanding of obligation and everyday practice can be steeped in feeling.”⁹² Working on the mid-twentieth century Laura King argues that “fatherhood took on a new cultural and social significance, particularly from the mid-1930s.”⁹³ In the *Worktown* essays, fathers are present in the teaching of specific skills such as cork-work or knot-tying, with time spent with fathers represented as a special treat: “Saturday was an enormous thrill, my father asked me would I like to go [to] the hen pen [with him], I said yes.”⁹⁴

Relationships are, by their very definition, relational and dependent on the input of at least two people. If a hierarchy undoubtedly existed in the relationship between parent and child, particularly over the control of behavior, the child nonetheless played a part in shaping how it operated. Dorothy Smith, quoted above, decided against helping her mother further in town, following her day of chores, and went to the park instead. We do not know her mother’s reaction to this – she may have been furious – but Dorothy writes it as an autonomous and inconsequential choice, independently and casually made and based on her preferences of the moment. In another case it was the strength of the father-daughter relationship that allowed one child to dismiss the adult-defined expectations of her. She recounted “My father always says ‘If you are a naughty girl you will not go to heaven,’” adding “I know it was all a joke.”⁹⁵ Children were also aware that they could manipulate the emotions of others. The relationships

between children themselves are perhaps particularly significant here. In one account a child very directly took control of the emotional narrative in responding to her sister:

On Coronation morning I played with my sister at ropes. She likes playing ropes and so do I. That morning she had a blown balloon and she was playing with it at ball then she stood on it when it went bang she started crying because it had gone. I started laughing and I pulled a funny face and said gone away.⁹⁶

The strong social relationships of these children were therefore a key determinant of their emotional experiences. Certainly, the essays testify to the strength of family bonds within the domestic space. Imagining heaven, one boy could think of no more apt spatial reference than a domestic one: “When the days come I think they will always get up with the sun shining through the bedroom window.”⁹⁷ Yet these relationships traversed spatial boundaries, ensuring a continuity of emotional practice. Perhaps most striking is the shared leisure space of the cinema. Cinema has been represented as a space for (adult) female leisure – even if combined with an element of childcare – and also, separately, as a space for a developing youth culture.⁹⁸ In Worktown, young teenage girls attended *with* their mothers, in at least one case spontaneously: “When I got home I saw mother and she asked me where I was going so I told I was going to the pictures and she asked me which I was going to and I said the Queen so we both went.”⁹⁹ In fact cinema-going in whole family groups was not unknown. More than one child mentioned a cinema trip accompanied by both parents, while Alice Yates attended with her mother, father, sister and brother.¹⁰⁰ It was after a discussion of the pictures that Celia Roberts added: “I go everything [sic] with my mother and father.”¹⁰¹ Sometimes different spatial settings changed the relative importance of the social relationships. As Mass-Observation itself noted in its study of Blackpool holiday-makers, “Unquestionably, father has

a special function of guide and friend to the holiday child, while mother – who has this job all the weekdays for the rest of the year – takes a comparative rest, and leaves games almost entirely to the father.”¹⁰² This was borne out by one child who explained that “At June holidays I went to Blackpool for a week. We went in a motorcar. Every morning I used to go with my father on the sands. The best thing I liked was going on the south shore.”¹⁰³

Finally, paying attention to the children’s social relationships problematizes the assumption that the emotions of the schoolroom were less “authentic” than those expressed in the home. In fact, the context in which these particular children’s essays were produced arguably lessened the determining influence of the classroom. It seems unlikely that the teachers – enthused by the spirit of the Mass Observation project as they were – would have tried unduly to influence the children’s words; certainly they were not trying to impose a uniform code of feeling. On one occasion, a teacher noted the instructions that she gave to her class: “Write the title “Heaven” and then tell me what you think about it. Don’t ask me anything. Please put in your own thoughts and ideas.”¹⁰⁴ We do not know whether she and others acted on their own initiative or at the suggestion of Mass Observation, but certainly their attempt to elicit “sincere” or at least heartfelt accounts echoed the advice that Mass Observation constantly offered when asking people to contribute to the organization.¹⁰⁵ In many ways, too, these child-writers were exemplars of Mass Observation’s style and approach, reflecting the organization’s aim of creating an “anthropology of ourselves.”¹⁰⁶ Indeed, one boy unconsciously but strikingly mirrored Mass Observation’s deliberately surreal declaration of its founding interests, published in the *New Statesman* in 1937, when he described “what is good”:

The League of Nations is good because its members long to stop war

Schools are good

Aeroplanes, Ships, Trains, Motor cars, Roller Skates, Bicycles
Games, Birds, Binoculars, Compass, Watches, Maps, Toothpaste
Sums, Wirelasses, Telephones, Bridges, Roads, Electricity
Pictures, Hospitals, Chloroform, X-Ray, Soap, Baths, Policemen
Scotland Yard, Books, Paper, Printing, Dentist, Disinfectant
Fire-Brigades, Iodine, Parliament.¹⁰⁷

In any case, we should not assume that the classroom was a purely disciplinary space in which children had to conform. The essays suggest that it was also a space in which a strong sense of belonging could emerge. One small boy hoped to be a footballer when he grew up, declaring that he should like to play for Fulham or Tottenham Hotspur. He gave no reason for his support for these two teams – perhaps his family had once been Londoners – but he had a reserve option too: “Or else I would like to play for the school.”¹⁰⁸ More generally, however, such declarations of loyalty were based around relationships. Individual teachers inspired significant appreciation in the children’s writing. Asked what they wanted to be when they grew up, four children aspired to be teachers. One detailed what this would entail, presumably using her own teacher as a model: “When I grow up I shall be a teacher if I can...In my spare time I shall have to...read books and History stories and other stories to tell the children on days when we can have a story lesson. I shall have to learn a very lot of things if I am being a teacher.”¹⁰⁹ As already noted, when thirty-nine children were asked who they would vote for in the future, family and friends featured alongside political preferences. Three of the children also named teachers, while another wondered “why there are no lady teachers to vote for.”¹¹⁰ (One child nominated a classmate – “I like him very much. I come to school every morning with him” – providing another example of the way in which relationships traversed spaces.¹¹¹) These teachers, of course, would be shortly reading the compositions, as the children were well aware.

Yet a strong relationship between teachers and pupils is corroborated by Mass Observer Frank Cawson's jottings on the Pike's Lane children. One girl, as well as being "great pals with her mother," he noted, "says Miss Kemp [teacher] 'understands her.'"¹¹²

Conclusion

As one teacher parceled up the latest set of children's writing to be forwarded to Mass Observation, she scribbled on a cover note that "the essays will be entertaining and enlightening if not useful."¹¹³ In fact Tom Harrisson and his team largely failed to include any of this material in their analyses of everyday Bolton life.¹¹⁴ If little used by Mass Observation, however, the hundreds of essays collected offer to the historian a mediated perspective on what it meant – and, arguably, what it felt like – to be a child in the late 1930s. Mass Observation's claims that the Bolton area was typical of northern working-class experience were probably as groundless as most claims to representativeness, but the lives of Worktown's school pupils were nevertheless influenced by strong national trends which affected children across Britain: the increase of consumerism which continued to sit alongside deprivation; a popular Freudianism communicated through a rapidly growing advice industry; and the everyday impact of a historically-low average family size, which together ensured that childhood was increasingly commercialized, psychologized and valorized.¹¹⁵

The essays were written before wartime evacuation and the emergence of the post-war welfare state, the two dominant framing devices for understanding twentieth-century childhood in Britain. Certainly a dramatic change in the national status of children accompanied family reconstruction after 1945.¹¹⁶ Carolyn Steedman has argued that there was also a change in how

children expressed themselves, suggesting that selfhood and self-expression was actively cultivated in post-war schoolchildren through the instruction to write their experiences down in creative writing exercises.¹¹⁷ The years after 1945 constituted a highly specific context within which working-class children's writing was crafted and received, not least because of the way that "autobiographical narration fed into forms of political analysis and action which focused on the lived experience of working-class people."¹¹⁸

And yet, like the other experiential material generated by, or collected for, Mass Observation both before and after 1945, the Bolton essays facilitate access to individual feelings and experiences. Crucially, they reveal the emotional practices through which children negotiated their own place within the world. If as Lynn Abrams suggests, "telling stories about the self is part of the process of self-formation," then it is also the case that experience – experience as discursively constituted but also felt and rooted in the materiality of social relations – provides the foundation upon which those stories are crafted.¹¹⁹ As Selina Todd has recently argued, "even studies of individual selfhood...suggest that we need more studies of relationships and collective action – of, in fact, experience... We need to return to the study of relationships if we are to understand how people experienced and changed the world in which they lived."¹²⁰ If everyday, felt, experience served as a resource for the writing of these children then their literary output provides evidential access to that felt experience.

The essays written by these schoolchildren therefore offer an opportunity to explore "the practices of daily life in which emotional relations are embedded."¹²¹ They facilitate access to the subjectivities of a generation who would grow to adulthood during the Second World War and participate in the re-building of Britain in its aftermath. They demonstrate that, within the 1930s' school context, working-class children were reflexive and observant life writers, able

to manage complex emotions and able to narrate movement between different spaces and different relationships. In their essays we see them self-fashioning from an array of different resources in complex and revealing ways. The children's familiarity with adult-defined emotional codes and styles facilitated transitions across physical and imaginary spaces. And yet their everyday emotional experiences were less about "learning to feel" than feeling through practice. This practice was a process embedded in the material context, spaces and – particularly – the relationships of everyday life. Social relations actively constituted the experience of being a 1930s' child, an experience which shaped written understandings of the self in the world.

¹ Mass Observation Archive (MOA), WC49/A. Pseudonyms have been used for children throughout. Spelling and grammar has been corrected. Mass Observation material is used by permission of the Trustees of the Mass Observation Archive, University of Sussex. We are grateful to Carol Dyhouse and the two anonymous referees for their comments and suggestions.

² The majority of the essays are by girls because the Mass Observation contacts in these schools were all women and therefore only taught either mixed junior or senior girls' classes.

³ On the history of Mass Observation see James Hinton, *The Mass Observers. A History, 1937-1949* (Oxford, 2013). On the Bolton project in particular see David Hall, *Worktown. The Astonishing Story of the Project that Launched Mass-Observation* (London, 2015).

⁴ Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown. A Study in Modern American Culture* (New York, 1929).

⁵ Mass Observation. *The Pub and the People* (1943, London, 1987), xvi.

⁶ Humphrey Jennings and Charles Madge (eds), *May the Twelfth: Mass-Observation Day*

Surveys 1937 (London, 1937). See also Nick Hubble, *Mass-Observation and Everyday Life. Culture, History, Theory* (London, 2006), 120-132.

⁷ Mass Observation, *First Year's Work, 1937-38* (London, 1938), 66; Mass Observation. *The Pub and the People*, (1943, London, 1987), xvi. Mass Observation recruited a volunteer panel who contributed "day surveys" and subsequently diaries and responses to monthly open-ended questionnaires called "directives".

⁸ Charles Madge and Tom Harrison, *First Year's Work*, (London, 1938), 117.

⁹ Peter Gurney, "'Intersex and 'Dirty Girls': Mass-Observation and Working-Class Sexuality in England in the 1930s," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 8:2 (1997): 256-90. Though James Hinton's history of Mass Observation, detailing the involvement of working-class full-timers and that of unpaid local volunteers, provides a partial corrective to this view. Hinton, *Mass Observers*, 2-24.

¹⁰ MOA, TC59/1/B.

¹¹ MOA, TC59/6/D.

¹² MOA, TC59/5/D; MOA, WC49/C.

¹³ Peter Stearns and Carol Z. Stearns, "Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards," *American Historical Review* 90 (1985): 813-836.

¹⁴ William Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge, 2001). For an interpretative survey of the field see Jan Plamper, *The History of Emotions. An Introduction* (Oxford, 2015).

¹⁵ Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca, 2006); Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Generations of Feeling: A History of Emotions, 600-1700* (Cambridge, 2016), 3.

¹⁶ Benno Gammerl, "Emotional Styles – Concepts and Challenges," *Rethinking History. The Journal of Theory and Practice* 16:2 (2012): 161-175, 163-4.

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- ¹⁷ Monique Scheer, 'Are Emotions a Kind of Practice (and is that what makes them have a history)? A Bourdieuan approach to understanding emotion', *History and Theory*, 51 (May 2012): 193-220, 216.
- ¹⁸ Scheer, "Are Emotions a Kind of Practice", 193.
- ¹⁹ K. Vallgård, K. Alexander and S. Olsen, "Emotions and the Global Politics of Childhood", in S. Olsen (ed.), *Childhood, Youth and Emotions in Modern History: National, Colonial and Global Perspectives* (Basingstoke, 2015), 20, 23.
- ²⁰ Ibid., 20
- ²¹ Pascal Eitler, Stephanie Olsen, and Uffa Jensen, 'Introduction', in Ute Frevert et al, *Learning How to Feel. Children's Literature and Emotional Socialization, 1870-1970* (Oxford, 2014), 14, 5.
- ²² Kristine Alexander, "Can the Girl Guide Speak? The Perils and Pleasures of Looking for Children's Voices in Archival Research," *Jenuesse: Young People, Texts, Cultures* 4:1 (2012): 132-145.
- ²³ Peter N. Stearns, "Challenges in the History of Childhood," *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 1:1 (2008): 34-42, 35.
- ²⁴ Mathew Thomson, *Lost Freedom. The Landscape of the Child and the British Post-War Settlement* (Oxford, 2013), 10.
- ²⁵ Frevert et al, *Learning How to Feel*, 8.
- ²⁶ Carolyn Steedman, *The Tidy House*, (London, 1982, 1987), 8, 12.
- ²⁷ Emily C. Bruce, "'Each word shows how you love me': The Social Literacy Practice of Children's Letter Writing (1780-1860)," *Paedagogica Historica* 50:3 (2014): 247-264, 262; Saheed Aderinto, "'O! Sir I do not know either to kill myself or to stay': Childhood Emotion, Poverty and Literary Culture in Nigeria, 1900-1960," *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 8:2 (2015): 273-294, 286; Siân Pooley, "Children's Writing and the Popular Press

in England 1876-1914,” *History Workshop Journal* 80:1 (2015): 75-98, 75.

²⁸ Christina Benninghaus, “Mothers’ Toil and Daughters’ Leisure: Working-Class Girls and Time in 1920s’ Germany,” *History Workshop Journal* 50 (2000): 45-72, 47; James Greenhalgh, “‘Till We Hear the Last All Clear’: Gender and the Presentation of Self in Young Girls’ Writing about the Bombing of Hull during the Second World War,” *Gender and History* 26:1 (2014): 167-183; Jane Elliott, “Imagining a Gendered Future: Children’s Essays from the National Child Development Study in 1969,” *Sociology* 44:6 (2010): 1073-1090, 1074.

²⁹ MOA, WC59/E.

³⁰ Catherine Burke and Ian Grosvenor, *School* (London, 2008); Catherine Burke, Peter Cunningham and Ian Grosvenor, “‘Putting Education in its Place’: Space, Place and Materialities in the History of Education”, *History of Education* 39:6 (2010): 677-80; Tom Hulme, “‘A Nation Depends on Its Children’: School Buildings and Citizenship in England and Wales, 1900-1939”, *Journal of British Studies* 54:2 (2015): 406-432.

³¹ Ian Grosvenor, “‘Seen but not heard’: City childhoods from the past into the present”, *Paedagogica Historica* 43:3 (2007): 405-29, 413. Original emphasis.

³² Joakim Landahl, “Emotions, Power and the Advent of Mass Schooling,” *Paedagogica Historica* 51:1-2 (2015): 104-116, 107.

³³ Peter Yeandle, *Citizenship, Nation, Empire: The Politics of History Teaching in England, 1870-1930* (Manchester, 2015).

³⁴ Paddy Dolan, “Adult and Child Identities in Irish Primary Schools, c. 1830-1909”, *History of Education* (Advance Online, February 2016).

³⁵ Kathryn Beebe, Angela Davis and Kathryn Gleadle, “Introduction: Space, Place and Gendered Identities: Feminist History and the Spatial Turn,” *Women’s History Review* 21:4 (2012): 523-532, 524.

³⁶ Stephen Humphries, *Hooligans and Rebels: An Oral History of Working-Class Childhood and Youth 1889-1939* (Oxford, 1981), 1.

³⁷ Simon Sleight, *Young People and the Shaping of Public Space in Melbourne, 1870-1914* (Farnham, 2013); Jane Hamlett, "Space and Emotional Experience in Victorian and Edwardian English Public School Dormitories", in S. Olsen (ed.), *Childhood, Youth and Emotions in Modern History: National, Colonial and Global Perspectives* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015): 119-138.

³⁸ MOA, TC59/6/A2.

³⁹ MOA, WC49/B.

⁴⁰ MOA, TC59/6/A2. On road safety see Joe Moran, "Crossing the Road In Britain, 1931-1976", *The Historical Journal* 49:2 (2006): 477- 496, esp. 481-2.

⁴¹ MOA, TC59/6/B.

⁴² MOA, WC49/A.

⁴³ MOA, TC59/6/A3.

⁴⁴ Alessandro Portelli, "The Peculiarities of Oral History," *History Workshop Journal* 12 (1981): 96-107, 99-100.

⁴⁵ Joanne Begiato has discussed the emotional dimensions to childrearing in an earlier period. See Joanne Bailey, *Parenting in England 1760-1830: Emotion, Identity and Generation* (Oxford, 2012), esp. 71-93.

⁴⁶ MOA, TC59/6/C/3.

⁴⁷ MOA, WC49C.

⁴⁸ MOA, TC59/6/C/3.

⁴⁹ MOA, TC59/6/C/3.

⁵⁰ Peter N. Stearns, "Defining Happy Childhoods: Assessing a Recent Change," *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 3:2 (2010): 165-186.

⁵¹ MOA, WC49/E.

⁵² MOA, TC7/1/B.

⁵³ MOA, TC7/1/B.

⁵⁴ MOA, TC59/6/B1.

⁵⁵ As Martin Francis has shown, emotional control was often seen as a marker of social status. Martin Francis, "Tears, Tantrums and Bared Teeth: The Emotional Economy of Three Conservative Prime Ministers, 1951-1963," *Journal of British Studies* 41:3 (2002): 354-87, 362.

⁵⁶ J. Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace: Cinema and Society in Britain 1930-1939* (London, 2010 edn, first published 1984), esp. 54-60. See also Sarah J. Smith, *Children, Cinema and Censorship. From Dracula to the Dead End Kids* (London, 2005), esp. ch. 4.

⁵⁷ Matt Houlbrook has explored this topic in relation to adults in "A Pin to See the Peep Show: Culture, Fiction and Selfhood in the Letters of Edith Thompson," *Past and Present* 207 (2010): 251-49.

⁵⁸ MOA, WC49/A. On the teaching of empire see Yeandle, *Citizenship, Nation, Empire*.

⁵⁹ MOA, TC59/6/B1.

⁶⁰ MOA, TC59/6/B3

⁶¹ Leslie Halliwell, *Seats in All Parts* (London, 1986), 12.

⁶² MOA, TC59/6/D.

⁶³ MOA, WC49/B.

⁶⁴ MOA, TC59/5/D.

⁶⁵ MOA, WC49/A.

⁶⁶ Andrew Davies, *Leisure, Gender and Poverty: Working-Class Culture in Salford and Manchester, 1900-1939* (Milton Keynes, 1992), 95. See also Sally Alexander, 'Becoming a Woman in London in the 1920s and '30s', in Alexander, *Becoming a Woman and Other*

Essays in 19th and 20th Century Feminist History (London, 1994), 222.

⁶⁷ MOA, WC49/C; MOA, TC59/6/D.

⁶⁸ MOA, WC59-E.

⁶⁹ MOA, WC49/B.

⁷⁰ Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages*, 24.

⁷¹ Plamper, *The History of Emotions*, 70.

⁷² Eitler, Olsen and Jensen, for example, stress the problematic nature of such binary distinctions yet also continue to use this language, being aware of its significance for historical actors. Eitler et al, 'Introduction', 7, 17.

⁷³ Michael Roper, "Slipping Out of View. Subjectivity and Emotion in Gender History", *History Workshop Journal*, 59:1 (2005): 57-72, 69; Hera Cook, "Emotion, Bodies, Sexuality, and Sex Education in Edwardian England", *The Historical Journal*, 55:2 (2012), 475-495.

⁷⁴ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004, Edinburgh, 2014), 4; Scheer, "Are Emotions a Kind of Practice".

⁷⁵ Scheer, "Are Emotions a Kind of Practice", 217.

⁷⁶ Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 210.

⁷⁷ MOA, TC59/4/B.

⁷⁸ MOA, TC59/4/B.

⁷⁹ MOA, TC59/6/B3.

⁸⁰ The male unemployment rate of 16.7% and female rate of 12.4% in Bolton in the 1931 census was lower than the Lancashire average of 17.2% and 16.3% respectively, and considerably lower than some of the neighbouring towns. See J. A. Jowitt and A. J. McIvor (eds), *Employers and Labour in the English Textile Industries, 1850-1939* (London, 1988), 217.

⁸¹ MOA, TC7/1/B.

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- ⁸² Carl Chinn, *They Worked all their Lives: Women of the Urban Poor, 1880-1939* (Manchester, 1988); Davies, *Leisure, Gender and Poverty*; Elizabeth Roberts, *A Woman's Place. An Oral History of Working-Class Women 1879-1940* (Oxford, 1984).
- ⁸³ See for example Michael Young and Peter Willmott, *Family and Kinship in East London* (Harmondsworth, 1957).
- ⁸⁴ MOA, WC49/A.
- ⁸⁵ MOA, TC59/5/D.
- ⁸⁶ MOA, TC59/5/D.
- ⁸⁷ MOA, TC59/6/C/3.
- ⁸⁸ See Elizabeth Roberts, *A Woman's Place*; Claire Langhamer, *Women's Leisure in England, 1920-1960* (Manchester, 2000).
- ⁸⁹ MOA, WC59/E.
- ⁹⁰ MOA, TC59/6/B3.
- ⁹¹ MOA, WC49/A.
- ⁹² Julie-Marie Strange, *Fatherhood and the British Working Class, 1865-1914* (Cambridge, 2015), 17.
- ⁹³ Laura King, *Family Men. Fatherhood and Masculinity in Britain, 1914-1960* (Oxford, 2015).
- ⁹⁴ MOA, TC59/6/C/3; MOA, WC49/E.
- ⁹⁵ MOA, WC49/C.
- ⁹⁶ MOA, TC59/4/B.
- ⁹⁷ MOA, WC49/C.
- ⁹⁸ Davies *Leisure, Gender and Poverty*; Langhamer *Women's Leisure*.
- ⁹⁹ MOA, WC49/E.
- ¹⁰⁰ MOA, WC49/E; TC59/4/B.

¹⁰¹ MOA, TC59/6/B1.

¹⁰² Gary Cross (ed.) *Worktowners at Blackpool: Mass-Observation and Popular Leisure in the 1930s* (London, 1990), 157.

¹⁰³ MOA, WC59-E.

¹⁰⁴ MOA, WC49/C.

¹⁰⁵ For example, a September 1938 competition asked: “What do you like about all-in wrestling?...make it short and snappy or long and argumentative. Anything you like. The prizes will go to those whose replies are judged to be the most straightforward and sincere.” MOA, WC4/4/E.

¹⁰⁶ Charles Madge and Tom Harrisson, *Mass-Observation* (London, 1937), 10.

¹⁰⁷ MOA, WC49/A; Tom Harrisson, Charles Madge and Humphrey Jennings, “Anthropology at Home,” *The New Statesman and Nation*, 30 Jan. 1937, 155. Mass Observation’s declaration of interests read as follows:

“Behaviour of people at war memorials.

Shouts and gestures of motorists.

The aspidistra cult.

Anthropology of football pools.

Bathroom behaviour.

Beards, armpits, eyebrows.

Anti-Semitism.

Distribution, diffusion and significance of the dirty joke.

Funerals and undertakers.

Female taboos about eating

The private lives of midwives.”

¹⁰⁸ MOA, TC59/5/D.

¹⁰⁹ MOA, TC59/5/D.

¹¹⁰ MOA, TC59/5/D.

¹¹¹ MOA, TC59/5/D.

¹¹² MOA, TC59/1/B.

¹¹³ MOA, TC59/6/B.

¹¹⁴ Mass Observation did, however, quote briefly from a series of essays prepared by elementary school children “in twenty schools in various districts” on “My Home and Who Lives There” in an early publication. Mass-Observation, *Britain by Mass-Observation*, (London, 1939), 218-222. Mass Observation also began a preliminary – unpublished – analysis of essays on “Heaven” and “Hell” penciling “believer” or “unbeliever” at the bottom of each. The analysis did not capture the complexity of the children’s written accounts. MOA, WC49/C.

¹¹⁵ John W. Stewart, *Child Guidance in Britain, 1918-1955, The Dangerous Age of Childhood* (London, 2013); on the impact of similar trends within the American context, see Stearns, “Defining Happy Childhoods.”

¹¹⁶ Thomson, *Lost Freedom*.

¹¹⁷ Carolyn Steedman, “State-Sponsored Autobiography” in *Moments of Modernity: Reconstructing Britain, 1945-1964*, eds. Becky Conekin, Frank Mort and Chris Waters (London, 1999), 41-54.

¹¹⁸ Steedman, “State-Sponsored Autobiography,” 49.

¹¹⁹ Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (London, 2010), 36. See also Lynn Abrams, “Liberating the female self: epiphanies, conflicts and coherence in the life stories of post-war British women,” *Social History* 39:1 (2014): 14-35.

¹²⁰ Selina Todd, “Class, Experience and Britain’s Twentieth Century,” *Social History* 39:4 (2015): 489-508, 496, 497.

¹²¹ Roper, “Slipping Out of View”, 69.